

**CITY OF BRIDGEPORT
CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION
PUBLIC HEARING
MAY 23, 2012**

ATTENDANCE: Cathleen Simpson; Chair; George Estrada, Vice Chair; Florisca Carter; Charles Valentino; Harry Weichsel; Ruben Felipe; Rev. Wm. Marshall

STAFF: Atty. Steven Mednick, Atty. Ed Maley; Atty. Mark Anastasi

CALL TO ORDER.

Commissioner Simpson called the meeting to order at 6:38 p.m. The roll call took place and a quorum was present. She read the legal notice of public hearing that was published in the Bridgeport Post on May 18, 2012 into the record.

CITY OF BRIDGEPORT CHARTER REVISION COMMISSION NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING A Public Hearing will be held before the Charter Revision Commission of the City of Bridgeport ("Commission") on Wednesday evening, May 23, 2012 beginning at 6:30 p.m., in the City Council Chambers, City Hall, 45 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Connecticut, relative to the following: to elicit public testimony pertaining to the revision of the Charter of the City of Bridgeport. This second statutory hearing is conducted in accordance with C.G.S. Sec. 7-191 (a) and in furtherance of the purposes set forth in City Council Resolutions nos. 30-11 -31-11. Copies of the Proposed Revised Charter of the City of Bridgeport will be posted on the following web-site, at least, forty-eight hours prior to the public hearing and will be available for review and purchase at the Office of the City Clerk. Persons intending to testify are reminded to sign the list for speakers upon arrival at the Public Hearing; and are invited to submit written testimony at the Public Hearing in addition to, or in lieu of, presenting live testimony. Attest: Fleeta C. Hudson City Clerk

Mr. Tom Errichetti, the Treasurer for the Bridgeport Library and the Klein Memorial, came forward to address the Commission about the Klein Memorial. He said that he had noticed that there were no changes made to the Klein, but in 2004, the management of the building was changed from the Library to a three member Commission. He stated that the building belongs to the City and that the Library no longer has anything to do with the facility.

Ms. Mary Pat Healy, of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) came forward to address the Commission. She thanked everyone for their time and said that having something like this was very important. The timing of the draft Charter release could have been better. She said that unless one read Sunday's paper, people would not know about the public hearing. BCAC would

have liked to have seen an executive summary with the changes. Clauses continue to be vague regarding checks and balances. There is nothing in the Charter that prevents City employees from serving on the Council, therefore voting on their own salaries. Public officials can be removed for incompetence but there is no clear definition. She asked what the vetting process would be for the various offices. She urged the Commission to continue their work and not rush to judgment. BCAC said that they look for a dialog once all the changes are completed.

Commissioner Simpson asked if Ms. Healy spoke for all of BCAC. Ms. Healy replied that she spoke for everyone, particularly the Executive Committee.

Mr. David Faile, the President of the Friends of Sikorsky Airport (FOSA), came forward to address the Commissioners. Ms. Simpson said that the Commission had not been able to complete the research regarding the Airport, but would like to hear his comments. Mr. Faile said that he was representing the Friends of Sikorsky Airport and that there were 650 members of the organization. He said that FOSA would like to see the Airport Commission expanded to include more representatives than it currently does. Mr. Faile then submitted a document to the Commission.

Mr. David Goodman came forward and greeted the Commissioners. He said that he was a City Sheriff since September 17, 2007. He then outlined the problems that have arisen due to the State of Connecticut discontinuing the High Sheriffs a number of years ago. Mr. Goodman said that he had called the State regarding this and that the State Official said that he and the other sheriffs should not perform any of their duties because the State no longer recognizes the office. Mr. Goodman requested that the Commission should consider changing the word "sheriff" to "constable" in the Charter.

Mr. Jim O'Donnell, the head of the Bridgeport Library Board, came forward and thanked the Commission for all their time on this project. He said that he would like to explain that the operation of the Klein was already set forth in the City Ordinances. He cited the appropriate ordinance and reiterated Mr. Errichetti's statement that the Library no longer has any responsibility for the Klein, other than the appointment of the Klein Memorial Board members.

Regarding the Library operation, he would request that the Commission look carefully at page 82 of the draft, which makes the City Librarian because it may be later challenged. He then said that in Section B, regarding the City Librarian, the Librarian has no function in regard to the Klein.

Mr. John Marshall Lee came forward and said that he had attended many of the meetings and that there had been a great deal of work done by the Commission. When he first spoke to the Commission, he spoke about openness, transparency and accountability. He said that he was not sure if the City would know the definition of the three items.

He said that it was not possible to have the City Budget and Appropriations Committee was transparency because they were not trained in financial matters or even receiving monthly reports. The monthly reports have not been released for over 20 years. He said that he had approached the Charter Revision Commission about this, but they were focused on Mayoral control of the Board of Education, not the City finances.

Instead, the City Charter is left with a statement that remains vague. He said that there were two Council members present at the public hearing who are on the Budget and Appropriations Committee, but that they had not received a March financial report.

Mr. Lee then said that there were to be two Council public hearings on the finances, which were not held. Mr. Lee then listed a number of details, which had not been addressed by the Charter. He added that there had been a recent vote about a staff position by the Council where two of the Council Members did not know that their vote would result in the position being terminated. He stated that the Charter Commission had missed the elephant in the room, and did not include a Finance Board, which would assist the Council. Mr. Lee said that he would like to see a new memorial, a Tomb of the Unknown Taxpayer because the taxpayers don't receive the financial information they deserve.

Mr. Clyde Nicholson came forward and thanked the Commission for their work. He said that he was bothered from the beginning that the Mayor had appointed the Commission, but the Commission should have been an independent board. Mr. Nicholson said that the Mayor was simply amassing more power for his office. He then listed a number of issues such as the rising crime rate, closing the Annex, returning the Mayor term to two years, and not allowing the City employees to serving on the City Council that he claimed were not addressed by the Charter Commission.

Mr. Nicholson stated that the Mayor was on his way to becoming a dictator. He said that he had approached the Mayor about making the City a gun free zone and that people got more fines for parking than gun violations. He said that this was taxation without representation. The Mayor turned the Board over to the State. This was taking the rights of the residents away and is a Constitutional issue.

Mr. Nicholson pointed out that there were no qualifications for the office of Mayor. The Mayor has 10 votes on the Council because there were 10 City employees on the Council. There are gangs running the city and many other problems, so Mr. Nicholson said that the Mayor should not be given any more power. He said that the Federal Government should come in and take over the City.

Mr. Nicholson claimed that half the residents don't know what the Charter say. If the residents vote for the Charter changes, they will be giving away their rights. He said that each time there were similar changes, he was losing rights, such as voting for the members of the Board of

Education, and the rising taxes. Mr. Nicholson concluded by stating that the Mayor will be giving himself a life time seat and no one will be able to stop him.

Ms. Marie Zambrano, the Executive Director of Excel Bridgeport, came forward and said that she graduated from Central High School. She now heads EXCEL Bridgeport. The City had been in a crisis and has been for a long time. Only 3% of the Bridgeport high school students are working at grade level.

Excel Bridgeport supports the Charter. She said that it was good to have a 100% appointed Board of Education and that unity and respect among Board members is vital. Having experts and skill sets on the Board will also be important. She said that there would be a vetting process and language that clearly describes the roles of the Board and the Superintendent. There had been a dramatic shift in the District and a testament to what an appointed Board can do for the City. The experience in the past year makes her very encouraged, but there is no silver bullet. It is a complex issue.

Mr. Sixto Cancel came forward along with a small group of his peers and said that he and his friends graduated last year, and that he was very excited to hear about the changes in Bridgeport. When Mr. Cancel was in D.C., he heard about the changes and many people in the nation are watching Bridgeport as it considers changes.

Mr. Cancel then explained that he had attended Virginia Commonwealth University, and needed quite a bit of tutoring. His peers shared this experience. Some of the middle schoolers have also expressed anxiety about being prepared.

Before the State intervention and the new Board arrived, Mr. Cancel attended the BOE meetings. However when he tried to speak, he was told to shut up. He said that Board Members arrived late, which was disrespectful to those who were there on time. The new Board was showing everyone how Board of Education members should act.

During his time in the Bridgeport schools, his grades were As and Bs, but after taking the college courses, he realized he shouldn't have been receiving As and Bs.

Mr. Cancel then gave an example about a magazine where a woman hired the best experts in the field so that her subscriptions went from 5,000 to 500,000 in a two year period. It's time to bring in the experts and start the reforms. Bridgeport can't keep doing the same thing and expect different results.

Ms. Elaine Pivrotto came forward and said that many people have spoken about what the Commission did not do, but she would like to praise them for all that they had done.

Mr. Mike Garrett, of Bridgeport, said that he supports a different configuration on the City Council. Right now, the Mayor has a monopoly and the budget would be under the control of

the Mayor. There is no minority representation. He said that in Hartford there is minority representation and there are also some elected positions along with appointed positions. He said that this should be discussed and considered.

Commissioner Simpson asked if there was anyone else who wished to address the Commission. Hearing none, she closed the public hearing at 7:27 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

**** COMMISSIONER VALENTINO MOVED TO ADJOURN.**

**** COMMISSIONER ESTRADA SECONDED.**

**** THE MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

The meeting adjourned at 7:27 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon L. Soltes
Telesco Secretarial Services